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History, French Revolution



Chen Hao World History 9, Period 4 1-I-13 First Draft of French Revolution Essay Why was there a revolution in France in 1789? The French Revolution was a imaginary train that changed the direction of thought in Europe and also showed the end of the “ Modern Age”, which is called the Ancién Regime in France, and showed the beginning of a “ Contemporary Age”. The absolutism of the Ancién Regime was the seed that planted the fury of the people in France and it was the main reason that started the revolution. The unfairness of the First and Second State (Clergy and Nobles which were the rich population that represented 3% of the French population), the economic problems that led France to a disastrous situation which people began stealing food of others and also the public thinking and reasoning were altered by Enlightenment ideas that made them think and question about the government. The Ancién Regime was a long-term cause that led the main direction of the French Revolution.. The French social system had the same social hierarchy as a Feudal social system, which is a middle age social system that divided the social hierarchy in three parts, the Ancién Regime developed the society in three states, the First State was the Church including the clergy and monks, the Second State was the nobility which include government service, army and parlements, and Third State was formed by normal citizens (Ellis 210). The Church in France enjoyed a very wealthy privileges, they had levied a tithe on all agricultural products, they owned 10 percent of the land and they did not have to pay taxes for them (Ellis 210), but also they often played their role in government affairs to make some decisions (Kramer, Colton, and Palmer 350). The nobles were no wealthier than the Church, they had enjoyed their wealth in the age of Louis

XIV, but in the age of Louis XVI the nobility was monopolized (Kramer, Colton, and Palmer 351), they took a stand against the government because they are feared to lose power and freedom to pay their taxation. The Third State which were the citizens of France, they have led the French Revolution, the Third State was very diverse; at the top were the bourgeois who were merchant, traders lawyers, bankers and doctors (middle class), at the bottom there were the lowest class, who were poor members formed by servants, industrial workers and urban workers (Ellis 212); in the Third State, there were people that survived winning their wages and they had to pay a lot of taxes because the First and the Second State did not had to pay for it. The privileges of the two states (First and Second State) made the First State get furious. Adding the cold season of 1788, the unfairness of votes which the Third Estate had 97% of the population and their votes could be denied by the First and the Second State, the silence of the representatives of the Third State and the speech of Maximilien Robespierre. All those examples were the perfect ingredient to made fury of the Third Estate and also to search for the justice and the equality. Another long-term cause which was one of the main wagon of our imaginary train, it was the economical problems that Louis XIV left after his death, Louis XIV was the grandfather of the king Louis XVI, Louis XIV had built a very strong army during his reign; however, he participated the Seven Years War, which brought France a lot of debts, the defeat in the battle of the port of Quebec in 1789, lead France to a very chaotic situation and also obligated Louis XIV to lose his colonies to the British Empire(The American School of Madrid), the wars that Louis XIV had had during his reign somehow convinced Louis XVI to make the same mistake. Louis XVI wanted

to avenge the defeat of his grandfather against the British, he looked for the American Revolutionary War, he took this opportunity to fought against the British by helping United States, but Louis XVI waisted two billion pounds (French pounds), which could feed seven million French citizens during a whole year, to help the American army fighting against the British; this investment began a new economics problem which brought to France a very desperate situation adding some others that they had before which will combine a perfect train to lead a revolution. The debts that the wars brought was not the only economic trouble that affected the revolution. Back to Paris, in particular, the palace of Versailles, Maria Antoinette, who was the wife of Louis XVI, an archduchess of a Hapsburg family that married him by a covenant relationship between Austria and France, she was putting coal in the engine of the imaginary train of the revolution; literally, she was generating debts by waisting money entertaining herself. For example she waisted money by buying shoes, dresses, making fashionable (basically ridiculous) hairstyle as 30 centimeters high of hair, bets and theater plays for fun. Finally, people called her “ madame deficit” because she generated debts only for her whims, taking into account the chaotic economic situation in France. After the events of the wars Louis XIV and the debts of Maria Antoinette, people and citizens of Paris had assumed the consequences of the monarchs; unfortunately, the cold in summer of 1788 and in spring of 1789 became one of the coolest seasons that Europe have ever had, these seasons made the bread as the main diet (people usually eat one kilogram of bread per day); however, the inflation, which was the main consequences of the war of Louis XVI and the debts of Maria Antoinette, doubled the price of

the bread and somehow it reached at the price of a normal people wage, people of Paris started stealing bread of other proprietaries, the bakers were beat in their own shop, vandalism and some unrest. Definitely the economy problems were a important cause to start a Revolution, as some historian said “ the economy is the engine of the history”; however, new philosophical ideas were invading humans mind, making then suspect and question about the absolutism and the monarchs, these ideas were called enlightenment ideas. The enlightenment ideas were another long-term cause for the Revolution. As it said before, French society was divided by three classes or states, the First is the Church, the Second the nobility and the Third the rest of the people, this hierarchy made the philosophers think about it, they played a significant role in the the Revolution. French philosophers questioned and “ attacked" the Anci  n Regime, they pretend to modernize the society, making the man to became more important than laws (Bachillerato Sabuco); however, some countries had adopted these ideas and the ruler of that country was called “ enlightened despot", but some countries did not adopted as France. Lets see some philosophers that intervened during the Revolution. First of all, Fran  ois-Marie Voltaire, who was a comical and a very outstanding philosopher, even thought he was Catholic, he had judged the Church, saying it manipulates the liberty of the society; he was asking for a natural religion that did not slave people (Bachillerato Sabuco). He convinced revolutionaries, which were people who fought against the Monarchy, and they became anticlerical thanks to the ideas of Voltaire. Another interesting philosopher that highlighted during the age of Enlightenment was Charles-Louis de Secondat basically referring to

Montesquieu, he argued about the Ancien Regime, he was against the absolutism and the divine rights. He asked for a division of powers and these powers could rule for themselves independently, which were the legislative, judicial and executive powers. Finally, Jean-Jaques Rousseau, he was asking for a natural society which the equality of the man would be the base of that. His ideas made a profound thinking for the revolutionaries, as in the Declaration of the Rights of Man in Virginia (in the American Revolutionary War), the revolutionaries also made a Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizens in Paris. The enlightenment ideas were important because without them the Revolution could not perform correctly because of bereft of a ideological basis. The French revolution of 1789 was caused by a lot of factors; some as the social structure of the Ancien Regime and the unfairness of the social structure; other like economics problems as the bad administration of Louis XVI; some other due the enlightenment ideas that have changed the thinking of the people. This causes later were seen in other countries and it was very significant to make people think to change their society. For example the Chinese revolution and the revolution of Meiji. In conclusion the causes of the French revolution marked a beginning of a new era of revolutions.

QUOTATIONS The American School of Madrid. Tribe Mike, n. d. Web. 1 Jan. 2013. . Bachillerato Sabuco. N. p., n. d. Web. 3 Jan. 2013. . <http://bachiller.sabuco.com/historia/caurevfr.pdf> this is the pdf Ellis, Elisabeth Gaynor. World History the Modern Era. New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 2009. Print. Kramer, LLOYD, Joel Colton, and R. R Palmer. A History of the Modern World. New York: McGraw Hill, 2007. Print.